Mutual Expectations of Research Advisors and Advisees

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The relationship between advisor and advisee is central to the experience of students in research-based graduate programs. Both partners in this relationship must contribute for it to succeed. Successful advisor-advisee relationships enhance the careers of both partners. The relationship can take on three dimensions: advisor-advisee; supervisor-employee; and mentor-mentee. In the best cases, the three dimensions work together. This document articulates key contributions from each partner to an advisor-advisee relationship that leads to mutual benefit.

The Advisor

Advising graduate students in research-based programs is part of the job expectation for almost all Georgia Tech faculty members. Graduate students build the faculty member’s research record and reputation by contributing to the advisor’s research outcomes. This situation carries an inherent tension: the faculty member’s success depends on the student’s success. The faculty member is responsible to outside sponsors for completing research projects. Nonetheless, as an educator, the advisor’s duty is always to protect the student’s interests as well as his or her own in the research relationship.

The Advisee

The student’s defining motivation is to earn a degree, which requires the acquisition of scholarly knowledge and research competence. Participation in the research process is an essential requirement for all Georgia Tech doctoral students and many master’s degree students. In this part of their education, the student’s duty is to put a best faith effort into his or her assigned contribution to the research process. At the same time, Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are also employees who help the advisor and research group meet the requirements of a contract or grant. As with the faculty advisor, this situation sets up an inherent tension between the student’s educational goals and his or her employment responsibilities.

Mentoring

When these potentially competing responsibilities have been successfully blended into a productive research partnership, the advisor may also become a mentor to the student. Mentors go beyond academic advice and good supervision to provide perspective and guidance on thriving in research and creative endeavors while at Georgia Tech, and beyond graduation. Beyond the formal responsibilities, mentors and mentees care about each other and support each other in a variety of professional ways. Many researchers maintain relationships with their mentors throughout their professional careers.
Mutual Expectations

Students Expect:

Respect
- Respect as a person, student, and professional employee
- Recognition and respect for differences in culture, ethnicity, gender, and other dimensions of diversity
- Commitment of time, effort, and financial support; advising only as many students as resources permit
- Active efforts to communicate across power differentials; encouraging students to express any concerns

Open and clear communications
- Mutually agreed upon expectations for frequency and format of communications
- Timely review and feedback on the student’s work
- Help resolving issues that arise, be they academic, research, or interpersonal in nature
- Notification of and appropriate resolution of issues that may affect the student’s support, such as changes in funding or the advisor leaving or retiring

Guidance on research
- Guidance on planning and managing research projects from conception to publication, including advice on resolving any problems encountered
- Reasonable, mutually agreed upon expectations of the time frame necessary to produce results
- Proper training and resources to fulfill obligations, including equipment, software, research methods, etc.
- Training on professional and ethical standards

Guidance on completing the degree
- Advice on how to be successful; informal knowledge of unwritten/unspoken rules and nuances of the academic environment
- Continuing advice and support on academic progress through the degree
- Advice on and management of the thesis/dissertation committee

Guidance on career
- Advice on advancing professional goals in the direction most desired by the individual student
- Opportunities to participate in career development activities
- Help building professional networks; introductions to professional contacts and alumni
- Good references to potential employers
Advisors Expect:

Respect
- Respect both as professor and person; recognizing the value of their time and their responsibilities within and outside the university
- Understanding that mentoring is tailored for each individual student and adjusted for progress in the degree program

Open and clear communications
- Mutually agreed upon expectations for frequency and format of communications
- Regular progress reports including what the student has and has not done, including set-backs
- Reasonable, mutually agreed upon expectations of the time frame necessary to give feedback and review results
- Discussion of difficulties with advisor first, before turning to other means for conflict resolution
- Notification as soon as possible if planning to leave program or advisor sooner than expected

Commitment & Productivity
- Understanding of the expectations of the degree program, advisor and research team, and GRA/GTA responsibilities
- Learning and progress through the program, with progressively more independence as the student advances
- Commitment and steady effort to make progress towards mutually agreed upon results and deliverables; adhering to timelines and deadlines

Responsibility
- Safe, ethical, efficient use of resources
- Abiding by professional and safety standards
- Good records and documentation that would allow someone else to replicate the results
- Taking feedback seriously and revising in response
- When graduating or leaving the team, leaving behind the data, computer files, and tangible research materials

Teamwork
- Working well with others; supporting and mentoring others in the team
- Carrying a fair share of the responsibility
- Understanding the common intellectual property principles involved in teamwork
- Meeting deadlines
- Thoughtfully reviewing the work of others, including the advisor